

Hall Urges Veterans' Widows to Call 1-800-827-1000 Help Line Washington, DC – War veterans' widows have been robbed of millions of dollars in benefits because of computer errors at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) over the past 12 years. These computer glitches caused money, ranging from \$100 to more than \$2,500 to be seized from the surviving spouses' bank accounts. U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19), Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, has written to the VA Secretary urging a change in its practices that caused this unfairness.

Hall is urging all surviving spouses of veterans in the Hudson Valley to call the VA's help line at 1-800-827-1000 or to contact his office if they think they might have been wrongfully denied payments.

"It is never just the veteran who sacrifices in serving their country, it is the entire family," said Hall. "This is especially true when service men or women are injured on duty. Their families depend on the disability payments they have earned from the VA. It's embarrassing that the federal government would wrongfully seize the money a veteran's widow needed for her dead spouse's funeral expenses."

In 1996, Congress passed the Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act – a law allowing a veteran's widow or widower to keep the veteran's final month of pension and disability checks. However, the VA failed to update its automated computer systems that send checks and notification letters. Because of this failure, veterans' surviving spouses were denied that final month of benefits or asked to send the money back. If the checks were already cashed, in some cases to pay for funeral expenses, the U.S. Treasury seized the money directly from the surviving spouses' bank accounts.

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee estimates that 50,000 surviving spouses each year since 1996 could be affected. In a letter to VA Secretary James Peake, Congressman Hall implored the VA to immediately pay any surviving spouses the benefits that were wrongfully denied to them.

"Unfortunately, this mistake is yet another dismal example of the VA failing to live up to its creed," wrote Hall to Secretary Peake. "As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, I have listened to thousands of veterans who bring forth cases that were lost, overlooked, misdated, shredded, and flat out wrongly denied. These mistakes must stop."

-30-